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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 170 JANUARY 27TH, 1943

DEAR MEMBER,

On the day following the publication of a recent Christian News-Letter, two letters of comment reached our office. One said that if we wrote more of this kind of stuff the Church would have much to thank us for; the other that what was written might be true, but cut no ice. This divergence of comment has been our weekly experience since the News-Letter began, but the contrast does not always find such sharp and vivid expression.

NEWS ABOUT THE NEWS-LETTER

The two following letters, which came within a few days of one another, speak for themselves. The second is from a man serving in the ranks.

(1) "I have been a subscriber to the C.N-L. from its inception. I have also sent Christmas gifts of a year's subscription to at least a dozen people during the past few years. I have, however, reluctantly come to the conclusion that I must cease to be a subscriber. When the C.N-L. was started I welcomed it enthusiastically. Here, said I, is something out of the ordinary. This will be no ordinary religious journal. This will appeal to the man in the street. It will make religion both interesting and intelligible to him. I have been disappointed. I am a teacher in a secondary school. I am supposed to possess a certain amount of intelligence. I read a great deal and I am interested in religion. In short, I have a great many advantages that the ordinary man in the street has not, and yet I must confess that I have only too often found the C.N-L. above my head, or too much concerned with subjects probably very interesting to parsons and religious specialists, but of little interest to the ordinary layman. Although I am not renewing my own membership, I have a considerable acquaintance with the clergy, some of whom are my greatest friends. I shall be grateful then if you will send the C.N-L. for a year to each of the following (here follow two names). I enclose P.O. for 25/-."

(2) "I enclose my subscription for 1943. I should just like to say how much I appreciate the Christian News-Letter. I am in the army and find it hard to keep in touch with events and thought in the Christian world—for in the army one lives in an entirely secular and materialistic sphere. The C.N-L. provides that link and is a weekly delight to me. Others read it too. It seems to me that it strikes exactly the note required of a Christian weekly publication—plain spoken, topical, with an excellent blend of facts and ideas, and finally of a very sensible length. That, of course, is merely criticism of the mechanism. The Christian standpoint that you express and constantly emphasize is an inspiration."

Naturally we are very sorry to lose so warm and generous a friend as the writer of the first letter, and intend to do what we can to prevent this kind of loss. These are some of the difficulties with which we have to contend.

(1) The editor might do better. He will certainly try.

(2) Many of those who have reflected most profoundly on the problems of our time do not combine with this the gift of interpreting them in simple language. Our editorial board is often confronted with the dilemma of having to choose between accepting a Supplement on account of the excellence of its substance, and rejecting it because the presentation is difficult.

(3) The blame, however, is not entirely with the writers. The questions of modern society are so deep, intricate and many-sided that a strenuous intellectual effort is needed

to master them, or even to understand them. The difficulties in many cases are not difficulties of language but of thought, and to simplify the treatment would be to conceal or distort the real nature of the problem and so to mislead. We have always two aims—first, to deal with subjects in the light of the best knowledge, thought and experience with which we can be in touch; and secondly, to present the matter as simply and lucidly as possible. If there were more time, we could more often score a bull's-eye on both counts. We try our best to achieve at least the first. Very little appears in the News-Letter that has not been criticized in draft at the weekly meeting of our editorial board, and drafts are also in many instances submitted to experts for criticism.

(4) Ease of understanding depends on what we bring to the subject. Our constituency is so diverse in that ideas which to one part of it are so familiar as to seem commonplaces are to others often new, strange and difficult. This diversity is, of course, from another point of view our greatest asset. If we are ever to arrive at a common mind which will enable Christians to act effectively together, the only way is for those who have different traditions and different experiences of life to talk with and educate one another.

It is a basic fact in life that if you have this, you can't have that. If you want a News-Letter that tries to keep in view, however fragmentarily, the Christian cause as a whole and the inexhaustible variety of matters that concern it, some of the questions treated will have only a remote connection with the job that occupies the waking hours of a particular individual. All that one can expect is to get something now and again that is plumb on the centre of one's immediate interest, while the rest is a means of widening one's outlook.

(5) Everything that appears in the News-Letter has to be kept within inexorable limits of length. This is a decisive factor in all sorts of ways, but it has compensations. Some time ago a man came to see me who has a large experience of certain forms of social service. He told me that as he travelled about the country he found that the Christian News-Letter was very widely read, and asked whether some of the matters in which he was interested could occasionally receive mention. I said that I should be only too delighted, but that we were limited by the fact that we had very much less space than the ordinary secular or religious weeklies. To which he replied, "That is why you are read."

THE SUPPLEMENT

The post-war task is the common concern of Christians not only in this country but in all countries. We are very glad to publish as a Supplement this week an address given recently to a gathering of business men, under the auspices of the London Missionary Society, by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. For reasons of space the address has had to be abbreviated, and Dr. Gerbrandy has consented to this being done at the editor's discretion.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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